Humanities | 2016-2017 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year.

    This year the Humanities department chose to reassess learning outcome #2, which we assessed in 2014-15.

    > "Students will acquire essential life skills, including the ability to reflect critically on texts and artifacts, to recognize and appreciate nuance and complexity of meaning, and to express themselves in a clear, organized, and well-reasoned manner."

    During the Fall 2016 semester, we discussed possible strategies for improving student writing based off the recommendation of the 2015-16 assessment report.

    In Spring 2017, the HUS assessment subcommittee collected artifacts of student writing from across our several emphases to assess different forms of student writing within our interdisciplinary curriculum. Courses included one Humanities course that serves our Science Fiction and Fantasy Studies minor, one course that is cross-listed in the Humanities and German that serves multiple emphases as an elective, and two History courses, one that forms a part of our Ancient and Medieval emphasis, and one that forms part of our new Digital and Public Humanities emphasis. Originally, we also included a Humanities online course that forms part of our Western Cultures track, but we chose not to use the student artifacts from the course as we found that they did not align well with categories in the rubric we isolated for assessment. We also eliminated four student artifacts that were pieces of fiction as they, too, did not align well with the categories within our chosen rubric. The assessment subcommittee assessed 25 pieces of student writing.

    We weighed changing rubrics, but we wish to use comparative data from the 2014-15 assessment, so we chose to keep the same rubric used that year. The rubric is a variation of one of Barbara Walvoord's writing rubrics in her influential Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education.

    The subcommittee met to standardize our assessment of student writing. At this meeting we made slight changes to the rubric that recognize difference amongst humanities disciplines, and we also remarked and took note of the tendency of individual faculty members to assess student writing from one's own discipline more critically than student writing outside of one's discipline, particularly when assessing "complexity" and "evidence."

    We spread out the 25 artifacts of student writing across the subcommittee, with two faculty members assessing 10 of the 25 artifacts to see if further standardization might be necessary. With one exception, the scores for each of those 10 were similar.

Categories	Results out of 5
Thesis:	3.55
Complexity and Originality:	3.42
Organization and Coherence:	3.60
Evidence, Support:	3.59
Style:	3.43
Sources:	3.7
Grammar, Punctuation:	3.59

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected?

The Humanities department will discuss and consider the report in fall 2016, and compare it to the 2014-15 report to consider whether our students are performing to the department's standards. The subcommittee will pose issues that arise when the unit tries to assess the variety of writing assigned across are curriculum given the large number of emphases within our program.

As a possible solution, the subcommittee will recommend that the department consider whether it should create learning outcomes for each track that complement holistic outcomes that span our entire curriculum. The subcommittee will also recommend that the department explore expressed interest in a development workshop focused on writing instruction in interdisciplinary humanities courses.